

Viral Meningitis

What is viral meningitis?

Viral meningitis, also known as aseptic meningitis, is a swelling of the membranes around the spinal cord and brain caused by a virus. It is serious illness, but not usually fatal in people with normal immune systems. Viral infections are the most common cause of meningitis.

How is viral meningitis spread?

Because of the number of different viruses that are capable of causing viral meningitis, the manner in which the virus is spread depends on the type of virus involved. Some are spread by person-to-person contact; others can be spread by insects. The most common causes of viral meningitis are enterovirus infections. Most people are exposed to these viruses at some time in their lives, but very few actually develop meningitis.

Other viruses that can cause meningitis are mumps virus, herpes virus (including chickenpox virus), measles, and influenza.

What are the symptoms of viral meningitis?

Symptoms of viral meningitis can range from mild to severe. Symptoms may include sudden fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, irritability, stiff neck and back, loss of appetite, seizures, sensitivity to bright light, and sleepiness or trouble waking.

Illness seldom lasts longer than ten days and recovery is usually complete.

What is the treatment for viral meningitis?

There is no specific treatment for viral meningitis, except trying to make the patient comfortable. Often the patient is watched for symptoms during a hospital stay.

Are there complications from viral meningitis?

Most of the time there are no continuing problems, but weakness, muscle spasm, trouble sleeping, and personality changes may occur for a year or more.

How can viral meningitis be prevented?

It is important to practice measures that cut down on the spread of viruses. These include good handwashing, covering your mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing, properly disposing of used tissues, and not sharing or putting objects into the mouth until washed with hot soap and water. Avoid contact with mosquitoes and rodents. Make sure you are fully vaccinated against measles, mumps, influenza, and varicella (chickenpox).

How do I get more information on viral meningitis?

Calhoun County Public Health Department

Phone: (269) 969-6383

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/meningococcal/about/index.html>

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This fact sheet is meant to provide general health information and is not intended to be medical advice or otherwise take the place of your doctor's orders or to diagnose your specific health problems. Check with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your health.

Calhoun County Public Health Department

190 E. Michigan Avenue, Suite A100

Battle Creek, Michigan 49014

Tel: (269) 969-6383

Fax: (269) 969-6488

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